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Assessment of transversal competences through social networks

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Abstract

In the European higher education area, the student is placed at the centre of the teaching/learning process, developing an active role, initiative and a critical thinking. On the other hand, ICT can offer new possibilities to develop necessary competences to reach student's objectives. In this sense, once competences are identified, we can see the use of ICT as a vehicle for providing opportunities for the acquisition and development of them. Moreover, the introduction of social networks has become a mass phenomenon of great importance, especially for young people who have changed the way of communicating, based on communication. For this reason, universities have started to use social networks supporting or complementing university teaching. The aim of this work is to take advantage of educational skills of social networks to test their educational possibilities. To do that, tutorials are expected to be used, so that each participating group will represent a group in the social networks and transversal competences will be also evaluated related to communication skills, team work, ICTs, etc.

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1. Introduction

The Web 2.0 caused that users begin to create their own content on the Web and begin to share it with other users, which has revolutionized the way we communicate in our society. One of the media preferred by users are now social networks (Boyd & Ellison, 2007), which have become in recent years one of the main ways of communication, especially among youth. Social networks link the concepts of community and cooperation to create a virtual environment in which information flows spontaneously by users. This communication and information can be exploited in academic as well as in other areas (Rennie & Mason, 2007).

The use of social networks in higher education is being extended in the last years trying to connect with the new ways of communication of their students or faculty members (Veletsianos & Kimmons, 2012)(Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman, & Witty, 2010). Sometimes universities use the most popular like Facebook or Twitter (Forkosh-Baruch & Hershkovitz, 2012) for these purposes.

Moreover, the Bologna Process provides the competences assessment as a novelty in the assessment process in higher education and includes the transversal competences as an important factor in the student development. These

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transversal competences can be evaluated in small groups (programmed tutorials), in which students can develop a continuous task during the course. For monitoring the tutorials work we propose the use of social networks to evaluate everyday work, communication and interaction of the students.

In this sense at the University Center of Merida, we have launched the social network CUMnectad@s (<http://cumnectados.unex.es>) for both teachers/staff and students having a meeting point and information center for all.

The objective of this paper intends to leverage the capabilities of social network in higher education and test their educational possibilities. To do so is to use programmed tutorials (tutorials ECTS) for each participant group corresponds to a group in the social network and to assess generic skills of communication, teamwork, ICT, etc..

2. Creating a social network

There are different software to create their own social network, one of the most known and open source is ELGG (Sharma, 2008). ELGG is a social web application that needs PHP and MySQL to run in a Web server, is easy to install and are available plug-ins to increase their capabilities. This software provides file sharing, blogging, social networking, calendar, friends, groups, etc. that can be used by the users. The first step to create a social network is to install it in a Web server and customize the environment, in our case choose an existing template, change colors and images with our own style.

You can also install different plug-ins from the official Elgg Webpage. In our case we install/activate the next plug-ins:

- Activity. Allow to create task that student must complete.
- Friends. Students and teachers can invite friends that they want.
- Blogs. Users can create their own blog or group blog.
- Event Calendar. Admin can create events in a calendar for the users.
- Files. To upload files.
- Photos. To upload photos and create albums.
- Groups. Allow users to create or join in a group.
- Grades. Teachers can evaluate student activity.
- Surveys. Admin can create surveys.
- Pages. Students and groups can create their own Webpage.
- Videos. Users can upload and share videos.

Once your site is created, you need to create content and invite users, all social networks need a reason to join so you must offer information and media to your users.

3. Monitoring tutorials

To test the educational capabilities of our social network we propose students create a group according to their real tutorial group for monitoring their work. The users are students from the Industrial Design Engineering grade enrolled in the subject "Multimedia Communication Systems". There are 10 students that are divided into three groups, each group must create their own group in the social network and invite their classmates and teacher (in order to help and evaluate). In the group page students can create and share the content that they need to complete their task.

Students use the forum for communication, pages and blogs to create information and files and video to share files and content. They know that teacher evaluate their activity in the platform.

Teacher can evaluate the progress of students and the task in the social network, but also he/she can evaluate transversal competences like communication skills, team work or ICTs. Elgg provide a general activity for each user compared with all the other users (Figure 3) and also you can see statistics data for each user to evaluate it:

- Activity responses
- Discussion topics
- Photos
- Files
- Blog posts
- Messages
- Groups

In our case, we use the own group site to evaluate the final task using all the content that the group have been generated. For transversal competences we evaluate the interaction between the group members (discussion and messages), ICTs (Photos, files and videos uploaded) and work group competence (Final task, discussion, participation).

Conclusions

The use of social networks in higher education is becoming a new way of communications with students and teachers/staff may use these new tools with different purposes. In our case we use both programmed tutorials and transversal competences evaluation in a group in a social network and we obtain a lot of data of students that can be used for assessment.

Also, other important factor is the motivation of the students for the use of an on-line environment and the possibility of show their own creations.

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